The Ivymount Strategies Room: Evaluating its Impact on School Within a School Students and Classrooms (2013-14)

Executive Summary

This report summarizes program evaluation outcomes for 2013-14, the first year the Ivymount Strategies Room provided support services for six target students with autism spectrum disorders at the School Within a School (SWS), a DCPS school. Several forms of data were collected, including interviews with SWS and Strategies Room staff, and DCPS standardized test scores.

SWS Stakeholder Interviews.

SWS staff were very positive about the impact of the Strategies Room on target students, other students, and overall classroom climate. Almost all mentioned the beneficial impact of the Unstuck and On Target curriculum, and stressed the importance of integrating this curriculum into classroom practices as early in the year as possible. SWS for the most part agreed that the Strategies Room had been responsive, done a good job balancing push-in with pull-out services, and communicating/collaborating with SWS staff. Typical comments included the following:

"The year before Ivymount came to our school, we had a number of kids identified with ASD, but we didn’t have Ivymount. The difference between that year and this year is like day and night. Not only do we have the resources kids in the classrooms need, but [Ivymount staff] have this expertise that they are generous with … and they’re modeling for me and for other kids some really strong ideas."

They agreed that Strategies Room had helped build capacity for the future, but were concerned that without ongoing commitment from DCPS, the impact of the Strategies Room would be short lived.

Strategies Room Stakeholder Interviews.

Strategies Room staff agreed that the program had a positive impact on target students’ academic and social skills, as well as on the social skills of other, non-target students, but admitted that the impact of the Strategies Room was uneven, and highly dependent on the degree to which general education classroom teachers adopted Strategies Room strategies – especially Unstuck and On Target vocabulary, and principles of positive behavioral supports. Typical comments included:

"The principal’s] proud to have us here, and we’ve made a difference and are a big asset to the school."

The biggest challenges to success were scheduling and lack of SWS staff buy-in, but overall, Strategies Room staff felt confident that they had had a very positive impact at SWS.

Student-Specific Achievement Data. In terms of student progress in response to Strategies Room interventions, all six target students made dramatic progress in social skills as measured by the ISRS, and all six demonstrated modest to significant growth in academic skills as measured by DCPS standardized tests (i.e., the iREADY, DIBELS and/or PIA). A few target students really stood out in terms of their social and/or academic progress. Typical comments included:

"Interventions have allowed [target students] to catch up with grade level and reenter the classroom."